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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to refute D.M. Perlmutter's claim that the syntactic component in Spanish grammar can generate structures that are grammatical at the deep structure level but not at the surface structure level, and that it is necessary to impose a surface structure constraint (SSC) as a filter to reject the ungrammatical structures. The principal evidence Perlmutter cites for the necessity of the SSC is the behavior of the Spanish particle "se." However, it is demonstrated here that there is at least one case in which a different deep structure analysis of "se" would obviate the need for a SSC. Perlmutter's analyses of the other sources of "se" are also examined critically. It is suggested that the whole notion of SSCs deserves fresh examination. (LG)

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CONSTRAINING SPANISH SURFACE STRUCTURE

John N. Green

Perlmutter has made the claim that:

> '..in order to characterize certain Spanish sentences as ungrammatical, it is necessary to impose a *surface structure constraint* that acts as a filter and rejects as ungrammatical any sentence that contains object pronouns that are not in the prescribed order. It happens that in certain cases where the surface structure that results from a particular deep structure is rejected as ungrammatical by the surface structure constraint, there is no way to actualize that deep structure as a grammatical sentence. As a result, there are well-formed deep structures to which there corresponds no grammatical surface structure.' (1971:xi)

Strong stuff indeed. He is in effect claiming that the syntactic component can generate structures which are -- and at the same time are not -- grammatical. Expressed rather differently: there are semantically well-formed structures that cannot be 'put into words'.

In the late 'sixties, when the notion was first floated, there was no public outcry against the absurdity of it all. Indeed, María-Luisa Rivero produced a cogent argument (1970) showing that the grammatical machinery then available was unequal to the task of generating Spanish negatives, without recourse to a surface structure constraint (henceforth SSC). Contreras and Rojas (1972) are mildly critical of Perlmutter, but seek to refine his argument, not impugn his axiom. And in her recent review of Perlmutter's monograph, Rivero's only faint anxiety about an otherwise 'first-rate piece of research' (1973:701) is that 'it may appear at first ... that they [SSCs] produce more powerful grammars and a weaker theory.'

Those worried by this turn of events will be cheered by the uncompromising opposition of M.S.Beukenkamp, who pours withering scorn on the whole idea of SSCs:

> 'At this point it is pertinent to ask about the explanatory power of a device such as a SSC. It has none. A SSC does not explain anything. It is merely an expression of despair, like throwing one's arms up in the air and confessing that in spite of all the powerful machinery we have at our disposal, we are not able to filter out ill-formed sentences so we give up and add an extra piece of machinery at the end of the production line in order to discard the "bad sentences".' (1973:6)

Unfortunately, Beukenkamp's solution of generating clitics in the Base and having at *this* point an ordering constraint identical to Perlmutter's, advances very little along the road to explanatory adequacy.

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So much by way of preamble. Perlmutter's principal, but not exclusive, evidence for the existence of SSCs is the behaviour in Spanish of the particle *se*. No sentence is acceptable which has **se se* as a sequence, yet there are, Perlmutter claims, underlying structures which are perfectly well-formed and which under normal circumstances would give rise to the forbidden sequence. After rejecting constraints on the base structures or on the transformations, he concludes that a 'template' to 'filter out' the unacceptable strings must be incorporated between the transformational and the phonological components. The purpose of this note is to demonstrate that there is at least one case in which a different deep-structure analysis of *se* would obviate the need for a SSC.

How do Perlmutter's grammatical but unacceptable structures arise? In brief, because *se* itself has three distinct sources. The first, and least controversial, he calls 'spurious': whenever two third-person clitic pronouns, the first dative and the second accusative, occur in sequence the dative (either *le*, singular, or *les*, plural) becomes *se*. Thus:

(1) Enrique dio a Carlos el diario que compraste ayer
'Henry gave Charles the paper you bought yesterday'

may be pronominalized as either:

(1a) Enrique le dio el diario que compraste ayer, or:
(1b) Enrique lo dio a Carlos.

The double pronominalization, however, is

(1c) Enrique se lo dio

for the sentence **Enrique le* (or *les*) *lo dio* is ungrammatical. Perlmutter follows the usual practice of accepting this as one of the inexplicable facts of life. He sets up a minor transformational rule -- apparently pre-lexical -- to produce the correct form, (1971:22):

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{Pro} \\ \text{III} \\ \text{Dative} \end{bmatrix} \quad \begin{bmatrix} \text{Pro} \\ \text{III} \\ \text{Acc} \end{bmatrix}$$

$$1 \qquad 2 \qquad \rightarrow \quad se, 2$$

So much for the 'spurious' variety.

Secondly, *se* may be a reflexive pronoun, exactly comparable with *me, te, nos, os,* as in:

(2) me afeito 'I shave myself'
(3) os vestís 'you dress yourselves'
(4) se divierten 'they amuse themselves'.

It is recognised that some verbs, unlike those in (2-4), are always reflexive (e.g. *atreverse, arrepentirse*), but this has no effect on the status of the clitic pronoun.

Thirdly, Perlmutter recognises a 'kind of *se* I will call "impersonal *se*", for it arises as a result of an underlying *Pro* subject which is like *on* in French and *man* in German' (1971:29). Hence:

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(5) En Méjico se trabaja mucho
'In Mexico one [*Pro*] works hard'.

The situation is further complicated by two ancilliary features of pronominalization in Spanish. The first is that a 'dative' pronoun is not always indicative of a 'simple' indirect object: it may reflect a construction known to Latin grammarians as an 'ethic' dative:

(6) Se me estropeó el sombrero
'My hat got ruined (on me)'
(7) Para colmo de todo, se me le robó el dinero a mi hija
'It was the last straw when my daughter's money got stolen (on me)'.

Of course, when the 'ethic' attribution is third person, a *se* may be involved as a result of the 'spurious' rule:

(8) Le torcí el brazo ⟹ (8a) se lo torcí
'I twisted his arm' ⟹ 'I twisted it (on him)'.

Secondly, in many contexts, Spanish permits the pronominalization of a whole clause or sentence:

(9) A María le permite su padre salir hasta medianoche, pero a Laura no se lo permite el suyo.
'Mary's father allows her to stay out until midnight, but Laura's doesn't (allow it to her)'.

Now the machinery which Perlmutter has set up to produce the foregoing acceptable sentences, also produces large numbers of *un*acceptable ones. A reflexive verb, whether or not inherently reflexive, cannot co-occur with a *Pro*-subject:

(*10) Si se roba, se se arrepiente pronto
'If one steals, one soon repents (it)'
(*11) Cuando se come, se se lava las manos
'When one eats, one washes one's hands.'

It seems, however, that there is nothing wrong with this sentence-frame:

(12) si se roba, se arriesga mucho
'If one steals, one risks a lot'.

Similar problems arise if we have a sentential pronominalization and a third-person dative, whether it derives from a 'true' indirect object or an 'ethic':

(*13) A mí se me dio el permiso de ausentarme, pero a Pedro no se se lo dio
'I was given permission to absent myself, but Peter wasn't'.
(14) Se le olvidó a mi amigo acudir a la cita
(*14a) ⟹ Se se lo olvidó
'It slipped my friend's mind (to turn up to the appointment'.

It looks as though Perlmutter is right in claiming that the deep structures of (*10, *11, *13, *14a) are well-formed both syntactically and semantically, that well-motivated transformations apply to them, and hence that only a mechanism which has access to the surface structure can be used to block the forbidden sequence **se se*.

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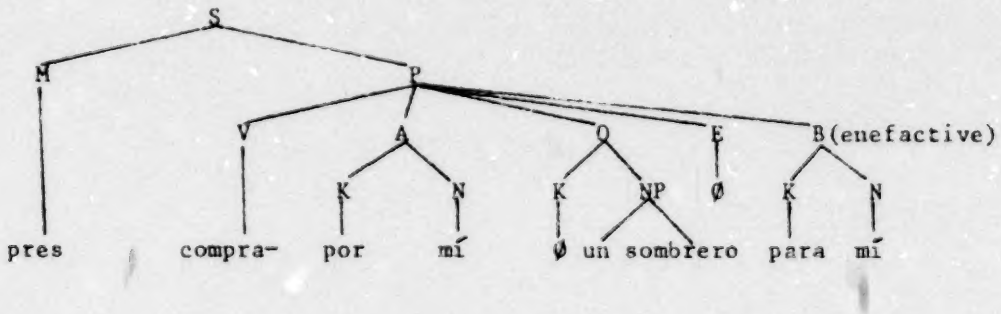
Before proposing an alternative analysis, I should like to draw attention to two minor -- but not insignificant -- flaws in the case as it now stands. The assertion that we can never have the sequence **se se* as a surface structure is not quite accurate. It is really a question of immediate dominance: we may not have two occurrences of *se* in any one S-dominated structure, whether or not they are contiguous. Thus (17) and (18) -- though far from euphonic -- are grammatical, while (*19a) is not:

(17) El bañarse se prohibe
'Bathing is prohibited.'
(18) Antes de quejarse se cerciorŏ de tener razón
'Before complaining, he made sure he was right.'
(19) Se me le olvidŏ a mi amigo acudir a la cita
(*19a) ⟹ se me se lo olvidŏ —

an untranslatable version of (14) with an 'ethic' dative. Secondly, the 'spurious' *se* rule, simple as it sounds, is not easy to formulate. Perlmutter's version is much better than, for instance, Foster's rather disastrous attempt (1970), but as he has allowed no mechanism to place the clitics in the right order to fulfil the structural condition, presumably nothing but the SSC prevents the generation of **lo le, *los le, *lo les, *los les*. It seems to me indefensible to set up SSCs to prevent the generation of unacceptable strings which apparently cannot be blocked in any other way, and then to use them to block other unacceptable strings which need never have been generated in the first place.

I want now to show that Perlmutter's second and third sources of *se* are misconceived: in other words, his deep structure is wrong. Elsewhere (1972, forthcoming) I have argued at length that the so-called 'reflexive' in Spanish -- despite its etymological transparency -- constitutes a mediopassive paradigm and is not to be interpreted as a personal pronoun plus active verb. There are inherently mediopassive verbs (continuators of the Latin deponents) and transformationally-introduced mediopassives. Medialization is triggered in two ways: either by passivizing structures containing an (inanimate) Objective but no Agentive, or, in circumstances similar to those producing reflexive-pronominalization, by the identity of the Agentive and Experiencer or some other case-relator lower down the hierarchy. The difference is that reflexive-pronominalization is obligatory whatever the two identical cases, while medialization is only obligatory when A = E, and optional thereafter. From:



we may derive:

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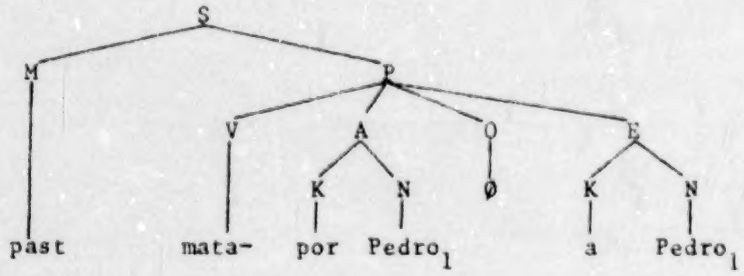
(20) Yo (me) compro un sombrero (para mí mismo)
'I'm buying myself a hat' —

in which the mediopassive is optional, and so is the retention of the prepositional phrase (for emphasis), but the reflexive-pronominalization is obligatory. There is no: **Yo (me) compro un sombrero para mí.* As we have said above, both are obligatory in A = E structures. From:

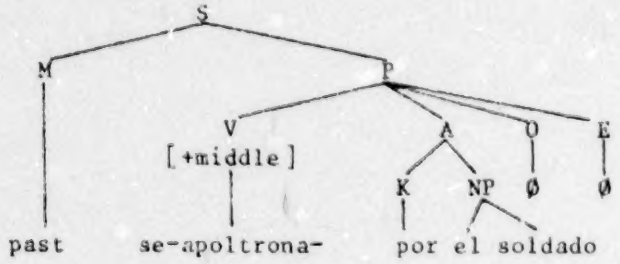


we may derive, depending which transformations we apply:

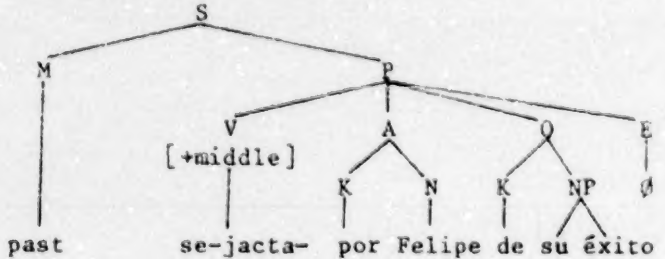
(21) Pedro se mató a sí mismo
(21a)Pedro se mató por sí mismo
(21b)Pedro mismo se mató
(21c)Pedro se mató —

which all convey the basic meaning that 'Peter killed himself'.

Verbs which are inherently mediopassive, and which have to be so marked in the lexicon, participate in a restricted range of constructions. They all require immediate Agentive-raising -- which automatically blocks passivization, and those which permit an Objective, introduce it prepositionally, thus doubly blocking passivization. Moreover, the exponent of the Agentive can never occur as the exponent of some other case, so there is no source of reflexive-pronominalization. Examples might be:



(22) El soldado se apoltronó
'The soldier lost his nerve' (lit: acted like a coward)



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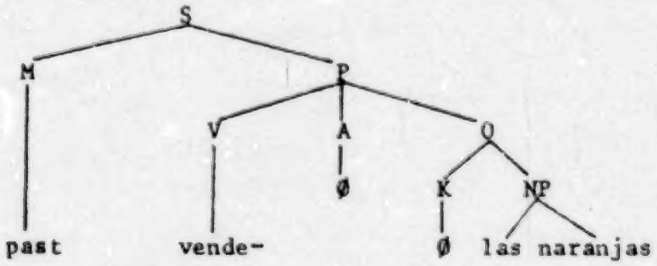
(23) Felipe se jactó de su éxito
'Philip boasted of his success.'

The reason these structures cannot yield 'passivized' forms is simply that they are passive already: we thus correctly predict the deviance of **su exitó se jactó por Felipe* etc.

Suppose now that we have a verb which logically requires human agency (as the vast majority do) and that it is placed in a structure with none expressed. The only grammatical surface structure that can be produced is a passive. From:



we may derive, after passivization, the denotationally-synonymous pair:

(24) { las naranjas se vendieron
{ las naranjas fueron vendidas
'The oranges were sold.'

Suppose the same verb, which pre-eminently requires human agency, were to be placed in a structure with not even an Objective. Again, a grammatical surface form could result via passivization: *se vende*. Here is Perlmutter's *Pro*-subject; it is no such thing. The construction *has no subject* either in the deep structure or on the surface. It means simply, 'there is selling / selling is going on.' Notice that the conditions already imposed preclude this solution for inherent middles: such verbs may not be passivized and, deprived of their Agentives, all derivations block. Notice too, that this interpretation holds good for Latin: *venire* 'to come', deprived of an Agentive, may be actualized as the impersonal passive *venitur; proficisci* 'to set out', a middle verb, blocks.

In effect, this analysis shows that Perlmutter's second and third sources of *se* are only one -- and one which is different from either of his. *Se* is a separable but intrinsic part of the inflection of the middle paradigm. The odd corollary is that *se* is never a pronoun, for unlike the other clitics, *me, te*, etc, it does not have a double identity and function as an atonic, non-reflexive, personal pronoun: the third person equivalent of *me* in this sense is *le*.

Consider now sentences (*10) and (*11). The machinery now set up correctly predicts their deviance, and cannot generate them. They are ungrammatical because the **se se* sequence must mean they have been twice passivized. We need not have recourse to a SSC to prevent this!

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Admittedly, this does not deal with all of Perlmutter's problem sentences, but the others are, I think, of a different order. There is a good deal of disagreement among native speakers as to how many clitics, and which permutations, are acceptable. Some would not accept sentence (19) for instance, and I am certain that one of the sentences which causes Perlmutter most difficulty (*a los generales se les da los honores*, '*Pro* gives the honours to the generals') would not be grammatical for any Castilian speaker. Most of the other problems would vanish if we had a global rule allowing only one cycle of third-person pronominalization (it doesn't matter which) when the verb is third-person middle. This would deal with (*13), (*14a) and (*19a). Furthermore, Perlmutter neglects to mention an even more powerful 'sentential pronominalization' which Spanish possesses: the reduction of a repeated clause to just *sí* or *no*, which, though usually optional, I suggest becomes obligatory in such sentences as (*13):

(13a)A mí se me dio el permiso de ausentarme, pero a Pedro no.

Perlmutter is right: the semantic well-formedness of (*13) is beyond doubt, but any Spanish speaker would *say* (13a).

In summary, we have proved that in at least one case Perlmutter's argument for the *necessity* of SSCs is quite unfounded. The whole notion of SSCs deserves a fresh, and very sceptical, examination.

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